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ABSTRACT

Although administrators have applied the term "needs assessment" to many things, including desires and solutions, the term is becoming progressively more precisely defined. Assessing needs simply means identifying where we are now and where we want to be by a specific time. A new imperative for needs assessment arises from public demand that citizens be included in defining educational needs. Participants in the needs assessment process most often include administrators, teaching staff, students, and community members. This update on needs assessment contains summaries of assessment projects in eight secondary schools, including needs assessment for staff development, for career education, for opening a new school, and for determining cognitive needs. (Author)

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Taking a New Look at...

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

"Needs" Not Desires or Solutions

Although administrators have applied the title "needs assessment" to everything from a simple survey for a semester book list to the complex analysis of an entire school system, the term is becoming today more precisely defined.

Assessing needs simply means identifying the discrepancy between where we are now and where we want to be.[1]

Often, however, "needs" can become confused with "solutions." Educators may state that their schools need new writing skills centers or teacher-adviser teams when, in fact, these programs are the possible means of solving problems.

Suppose, for example, that test scores show 20 percent of the junior class to be reading below grade level. An immediate remedy for that need might be to hire an extra reading specialist or to purchase reading machines to solve the problem.

We can view the matter differently, however, and define the situation as follows: (1) Where We Are is the present condition with 20 percent of the eleventh grade students having reading deficiencies, and (2) Where We Want To Be is to reduce the 20 percent group to five percent of the class by a given date, say June 1978. The opportunity then exists to discuss and analyze several alternative solutions for closing the gap, only one of which would be the hiring of a new reading teacher.

1. Kaufman, Roger. *Needs Assessment*. San Diego: United States International University, 1976. p. 38.

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When "needs" are defined as discrepancy gaps, the needs assessment process not only provides the possibility for a careful analysis of solutions, it also enables the principal to see where he is going; and, if valid tests are used, to know exactly how close he is to achieving school objectives.

Furthermore, distinguishing between "needs" and "solutions" (or desires) eliminates the necessity to choose between either student needs or community needs, an argument which is circular as well as time consuming and divisive.

Why Needs Assessment?

A broad rationale exists for developing a needs assessment program. Several states, for example, have mandated needs assessment to meet accountability requirements. This legislation usually includes guidelines and other required procedures for conducting the assessment. For example, in Oklahoma, House Concurrent Resolution No. 1027 states that "the needs assessment shall be undertaken by the local school staff in compliance with general direction and guidelines developed by the State Department of Education." And in 1975, New Jersey enacted a requirement that "each local board of education shall establish particular educational goals, objectives, and standards pursuant to rules prescribed by the State Board."

Declining enrollments and budget cuts give a new priority to the reassessment of school goals and priorities. In Elkhart, Ind., a needs assessment was undertaken to measure how effectively the schools were achieving their goals and objectives as first outlined in 1966, and subsequently used in curriculum planning in that community.

Developing curricula for a new high school, monitoring student and parent priorities, revamping inservice training for staff, assessing program effectiveness, and conducting follow-up studies of graduates are also cited by high school administrators as rationale for needs assessment.

Use of Survey Data

Many schools administer surveys—some of them quite comprehensive. Too often, however, results are carefully compiled, only briefly discussed, and then stashed away. Or they may appear cursorily in the principal's annual report to the superintendent. Needs assessment, however, requires not just a reporting of results to all participants; it also includes a process by which results of the survey are utilized for determining school priorities.

Who's Involved?

> Who shall speak for education? The consensus of as many persons as possible in the local situation is the answer. No knowledgeable person has ever said that improving education is a simple or an easy process. Many persons necessarily need to be involved; the wider the spectrum and the larger the number, the better.[2]

2. Trump, J. Lloyd. *A School for Everyone,* Reston, Va.: NASSP, 1977, p. 11.

A new imperative for needs assessment arises from public demand that citizens be included in defining educational needs. Participants in the needs assessment process most often include administrators, teaching staff, students, and community members.

In Sandy, Utah, over 550 parents, teachers, students, and administrators in the Jordan School District reviewed needs and established two major priorities relating to students:

- to develop pride in work and a feeling of self-worth
- to develop the basic skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and arithmetic.

A Goal-based Educational Management System (GEMS) was then designed to meet the needs of students.

Three related projects involving citizens, parents, students, and staff members were reported by A. E. Cavin, principal, West Bloomfield High School in Michigan. A goal-setting exercise was worked through by 1,500 members of the school community—staff, students, and parents included. Then a stratified random sampling of residents was asked how they felt about the schools. Then 258 members of the educational community worked in 18 committees for a three-month period listing all the district needs in a comprehensive report to the board of education. Finally, two members from each of the 18 original committees met weekly to compile a list of needs on the basis of priorities.

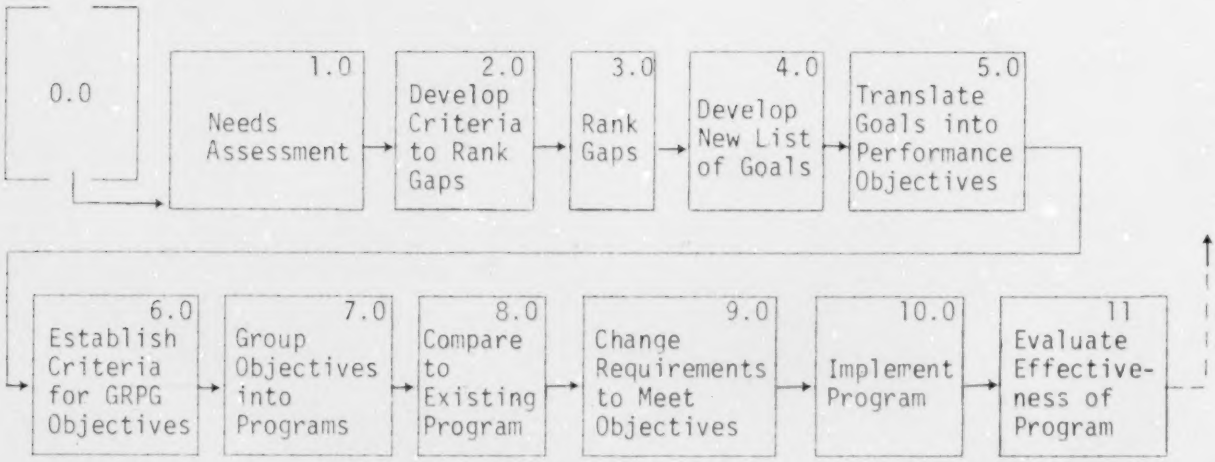
The Process of Needs Assessment

While several models are available, most needs assessment efforts include the following steps:

- ✓ Decide on which level to plan initially (class, grade, school, district).
- ✓ Select good instruments and processes.
- ✓ Determine where you are at present.
- ✓ Determine where you want to be.
- ✓ Reconcile differences among participants involved in planning.
- ✓ Identify priorities and select those on which action will be taken.

Needs assessment should be considered part of a larger planning process. Following the assessment, actions must be implemented and evaluated for needs assessment to make a difference.

In Sarasota, Fla., a thorough needs assessment was conducted at Venice Junior High School. The flow chart is included here to show the place of needs assessment in the total planning effort and to clarify the needs assessment process itself.


0.0
1.0 Needs Assessment
2.0 Develop Criteria to Rank Gaps
3.0 Rank Gaps
4.0 Develop New List of Goals
5.0 Translate Goals into Performance Objectives
6.0 Establish Criteria for GRPG Objectives
7.0 Group Objectives into Programs
8.0 Compare to Existing Program
9.0 Change Requirements to Meet Objectives
10.0 Implement Program
11 Evaluate Effectiveness of Program

Selecting the Best Tools

Panel discussions, small-group investigation, questionnaires, community speak-ups, and, in some instances, games have been successfully used as vehicles for needs assessment.

One instrument utilized by the guidance department at North Hunterdon High School in Annandale, N.J., involved in a 60-item questionnaire.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

To plan school and community activities that will serve you, we need your help! Please respond to each item by indicating first how important the need is to you and second how well that need is being met, not just by the guidance counselor but by anyone—your parents, teachers, friends, etc.

Name _____

Grade _____

Directions:

In the columns on the left, mark an X in the box which best describes how important the need is to you.

In the columns on the right, mark an X in the box which best describes how well that need is being met for you.

Mark a response in the left column and in the right column for each of the 60 needs listed.

Strong Need	Moderate Need	Weak Need	No Need		Need Being Met	Need Partially Being Met	Need Not Being Met
X				To know what jobs are available locally		X	

The above is an example of a strong need which is being partially met.

In Fall River, Mass., students, teachers, and administrators were asked to rank (1-3) a list of items prior to the opening of a new high school. A small part of the results published below show how differences appeared.

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE NEW FALL RIVER HIGH SCHOOL AS DESCRIBED BY STUDENTS, TEACHERS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

Responding Group	Improved Student Services	Community Awareness	Updated Guidance
Students	2	3	1
Teachers	3	3	3
Administration	3	3	3

1=Highest Priority 2=A priority 3=Lowest Priority

The School Bonanza Game is another tool. It can be administered to students (Grades 4-12), parents, boards of education, and laymen, as well as school staff and faculty. Basically, each participant is given a hypothetical sum of money to invest in various school programs, such as the three Rs or social studies. Players are forced to choose how their money is to be spent and then must rate the school (ranging from poor to great) on how well it is doing in each category. This process leads to a discussion of priorities among the participants. The game has been used inexpensively in many schools.[3]

Is It Worth It?

Yes! Most administrators find needs assessment to be a useful strategy with positive results.

Dr. Frank Rapley from Louisville, Ky., reports that the needs assessment effort in his district helped identify six serious shortfalls that became the basis for staff inservice at the Educational Development Center. Initiated as an attitude survey about Jefferson County Schools, during the first year opinions were solicited from 80 percent of all teachers, 10 percent of all principals, and the central office. Research has now moved more specifically toward student achievement. A mean achievement score in every grade in every school is now reported by the district.

Participation of students in the planning of a new school will lead to their increased commitment and involvement, reports Edward Morgan from Fall River, Mass., where a new student discipline code was developed. In Rome, Ga., needs assessment resulted in a new staff development plan which was subsequently approved and funded by the State Department of Education for implementation.

3. For information about the Bonanza Game, write to Professor David Mullen, College of Education, G-10, Aderhold Hall, University of Georgia, Athens, 30602.

Principal Walter Habel of Schoharie, N.Y., points out that by setting goals and objectives for each course, curriculum organization and coordination have been more effective. The criteria for reaching objectives have been determined. Expectations for students and teachers have been clarified. Employment of a Career Education Specialist for slow learners has been one outgrowth of this school's needs assessment.

Is it always worth it? This frustration expressed by a principal is repeated here for contrast:

> I can report that the outcome of this program was a carefully thought out priority list of needs. Unfortunately, as in most school districts in our state, the needs identified far exceed our financial resources to deal with them.

If lack of funding or other circumstance prevents concrete actions in response to needs, conducting the assessment still has intrinsic value. It enables administrators, staff, students, and parents to establish common perceptions about and attain agreement on directions and priorities for schools.

What's So New About Needs Assessment?

Not much, considering that effective principals have always stayed in touch with what goes on in their schools and made decisions only after careful consideration of all options. But needs assessment does include some important new dimensions of planning:

- Data are collected from all of the school's constituents.
- Priorities are determined conjointly by educators, students, and the community.
- Systematic evaluation occurs because needs are stated as discrepancy gaps; their attainment is measurable.

Can Educational Results Be Measured?

Some results, but certainly not all, can be measured. Today's administrator has little time for esoteric rumination, however. His major focus must be on getting the job of measurement done as efficiently and effectively as possible to meet assessment requirements and for future planning. The measurement of stated needs has proven to be a valuable means to that end. For example, determining needs in basic skills can be used as preparation for establishing competency levels.

Isn't There a Danger in Giving Everyone a Voice?

On the contrary, participation of all persons with a stake in education provides not only greater comprehension of what the "schools are doing" but also increases the chance that the community will be more receptive to implementation of new programs created to meet new priorities identified from the needs gap.

Reminders

Needs assessment is only the first step in the process of thorough educational planning. After priorities are listed and objectives identified, an analysis of alternative solutions (often on cost-benefit basis) should be conducted to determine the best solution or means to achieving desired results. Actions are then implemented and evaluated.

Needs assessment is not a one-shot deal! Some schools conduct needs assessment every year; others, every two or three. In short, needs assessment should be ongoing and continuous.

To Illustrate

SCHOOL LEVEL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Greenwich High School
John H. Bird, Principal

10 Hillside Rd.
Greenwich, Conn. 06830

In Greenwich High School, needs are assessed and programs established by a team comprised of administrators, teachers, students, and parents to develop objectives and goals for the school on a yearly and multi-year basis. Budgetary concerns are tied into objectives and goals and fed into the board of education's budget committee. Evaluation procedures are developed to complement objectives.

Participants include students in grades 10-12 and all staff, as well as custodians and cafeteria personnel.

The central purpose of the school-level program team is to identify building needs and secure board of education financial support and a board commitment to action.

One priority identified through this process was the need to return to basic writing skills. Actions resulting from this discovery included the development of a Learning Program Improvement Plan combined with the hiring of four writing tutors, one for each of the houses at Greenwich High School. The tutors assist the language arts teachers who have developed standardized procedures for correcting themes, and they meet with individual students to discuss student writing assignments.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Model High School
Nevin Jones, Principal

Route 2, Calhoun Road
Rome, Ga. 30161

Prior to initiating a needs assessment process with teachers, students, and parents, a course for credit on needs assessment was offered during the summer for teachers. In addition, principals in the county attended an all-day needs assessment workshop.

Three working committees were formed:

- Steering Committee:

  Principal, representative from the needs assessment course, and selected teachers.

  Responsibility: Work together for the selection of an advisory committee and to meet as needed throughout the year to guide further activity in the staff development program.

- Advisory Committee:

  Principal, selected teachers, selected parents, and other lay people in the community. The committee did not exceed 20 in number and the number of teachers should be less than the number of parents and students combined.

  Responsibility: To examine the goal statements and survey questionnaire (developed in the Needs Assessment Workshop offered during the summer) and recommend changes and/or alterations.

- Staff Development Planning Committee: (A standing committee)

  A teacher from each school, representation from FCAE (Floyd County Association of Educators), and three central office personnel.

  Responsibility: Compile system-wide goal statements and survey instrument as recommended by the advisory committees. Rank goals in order of importance, submit new release on forthcoming survey instrument, decide on sampling procedures, and compile and report on returned survey. Also, this committee will give further direction for future staff development as indicated from the survey instrument.

Results of the survey indicated greatest needs in mathematics and language arts. The outcome was that staff development in these two areas was emphasized in workshops and courses the following year with numerous teachers taking advantage of these staff development opportunities.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR CAREERS

Jones Commercial High School
Joan E. O'Malley, Principal

606 South State St.
Chicago, Ill. 60605

Jones Commercial High School, a school serving eleventh and twelfth grades in office occupational training, has developed several needs assessment techniques.

Since all of Jones' seniors work one-half day as part of their work experience program, the potential employers are surveyed to determine the number of students desired in six major areas: bookkeeping, business machines, data processing, machine transcription, marketing, and stenography.

A follow-up graduate survey reflects student evaluations of the quality of their training, as well as assessment of guidance and extracurricular programs.

In addition, an employer feedback survey, a summary report by teacher coordinators (concerning everything in assessment of students' training under their their supervision) and a survey evaluating outside AV equipment resources of students (used in preparation of the Title IV C proposal for a cassette lending library) are all collected as part of the annual assessment data.

Results are used not only for the current year's program evaluation, but are analyzed in combination with previous years' results for trends in employer demands, program weaknesses, and needs for new skills areas. Curriculum revision thus occurs only after an analysis of needs!

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR OPENING A NEW SCHOOL

B.M.C. Durfee High School
Edward P. Morgan, Principal

289 Rock St.
Fall River, Mass. 02720

As a prelude to opening a new comprehensive high school, staff and students at B.M.C. Durfee High School were involved in initial needs assessment in the spring of 1975. The result was a matrix showing priorities as seen by students, teachers, and administrators on such aspects as student choice of instruction and increased options in curriculum choices.

Since then, an ongoing needs assessment program has been operating through Project Open, a Title IV, C.E.S.E.A. Project.

Evaluation questionnaires for all activities such as staff workshops and courses, as well as year-end evaluation, have included questions to update the needs assessment.

Other steps in the preparation for needs assessment included visits to other schools, attendance at conferences, and the writing of a new high school philosophy.

Involvement of students has been extremely rewarding, reports Principal Edward Morgan. One result this year is a new discipline code.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Central High School
A. T. Bias, Principal

One Blazer Blvd.
Elkhart, Ind. 46514

In 1974, administrators in the Elkhart school system decided to undertake a needs assessment in order to measure the degree of effectiveness in achieving goals and objectives of the schools. Because the Phi Delta Kappa model included goals which were significantly comparable to Elkhart school goals, it was chosen as the needs assessment instrument.

Selected groups of parents, students, and staff were asked to make three responses in relation to 18 goals. Participants were asked to rank the importance of each goal (on a scale of 1-5) to estimate how well the Elkhart community schools were doing in meeting each of the goals (on a scale of 1-5), and finally, to cite what the school's responsibility in each of the 18 goal areas should be.

Emerging was a list of the goals ranked in order of importance based on all participants' viewpoints. A series of recommendations followed. Included were suggestions that the same survey should be repeated at a later date in order to measure any changes in perception of these 18 goals and that inservice and professional growth activities be designed to help staff members address themselves to the resulting goal priorities.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AS PART OF A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF GRADUATES

West Bend E. and West Bend W. High Schools 1305 E. Decorah Rd.
John M. Sheehy, Principal West Bend, Wis. 53095

John Sheehy describes the process of follow-up studies at the West Bend High Schools as follows:

> Six years ago the West Bend School district authorized a budget expenditure to cover the cost of developing a follow-up research assignment. At that time a questionnaire was designed to obtain perceptions from graduates of the class of 1971 and 1972. The unique educational programs as reflected by the schools-within-a-school concept, variable modular scheduling, and individualized learning prompted a need for evaluation.
>
> The perceptions gathered from the questionnaires were related to the quality of the curriculum, the educational process, and vocational education. Information regarding these areas helps teachers, administrators, and the school board look at needs and changes.
>
> In order to maintain a continuity and credibility in the findings of the alumni follow-up studies, classes were to be surveyed every first, third, and fifth year after graduation. As a result the classes of 1971 and 1972 have been surveyed three times, the classes of 1973 and 1974 have been surveyed twice, and the classes of 1975 and 1976 were surveyed once. This past year, for example, 1,500 questionnaires were prepared and mailed to the homes of all members of the graduating classes of 1972, 1974, and 1976. The previous year questionnaires were sent to the classes of 1971, 1973, and 1975. Parents are urged to forward the forms to their sons and daughters, and to encourage them to fill them out.

Answers to the questions have provided valuable information for planning. In addition, since the questions are designed for easy processing, a local business establishment has devised a data processing program through their computers. Results shared with teachers, community, and the school board have, in Sheehy's words:

> encouraged continuation of the program, and have been instrumental in the support, implementation, and continuation of alternative programs, flexibility, humaneness, and action learning within the school program. We have found a positive correlation between the objectives of the school and their fulfillment as told us by the graduates.

DETERMINING COGNITIVE NEEDS

Rhodes Junior High School 1860 South Longmore
Dr. Gail Pew, Principal* Mesa, Ariz. 85202

A complete assessment of "cognitive needs" was conducted at Fremont Junior High School. Instruments surveying such needs were filled out by parents as well as by students and teachers. A practical guide for teachers for the development of the statement of needs from the cognitive needs assessment questionnaire resulted. Part is included here as an aid to administrators:

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* Dr. Pew was principal at Fremont during the needs assessment.

THE FIRST STEP — State needs objectively.

Example:

Item No. 6

Do you feel girls should be allowed to take industrial arts courses?		S	P	T
a.	Yes	56	62	97
b.	No	17	8	0
c.	Undecided	18	17	5

The majority of students (56 percent) agree with the statement. A significant discrepancy exists, however, between student and teacher opinion.

THE SECOND STEP

The need has been stated objectively. No solution is implied. The group should then brainstorm possible reasons for the discrepancy.

A. Boys do not want girls in the industrial arts classrooms.
B. Girls do not want to take industrial arts.
C. Students do not see the potential advantages of having girls in industrial arts.
D. etc.

THE THIRD STEP

Once the needs are listed we move to goal statements or general (what is required) statements. Some examples are provided below:

1. Girls will appreciate the masculine skills of an industrial arts classroom.
2. Boys will understand and appreciate the talents of females in the industrial arts classroom.

THE FOURTH STEP — Develop "parsimonious" goals.

Go back and try to develop goals which incorporate as many subgoals as possible; i.e., following the principle of parsimony—explaining the most things with the least amount of words.

A NEEDS-ASSESSMENT MATRIX FOR GUIDANCE

Richard Gahr High School
Hanford Rants, Principal

11111 Artesia Blvd.
Cerritos, Calif. 90701

A comprehensive model for action within the guidance framework at Richard Gahr High School is described in *A Resources Approach to Pupil Services*. In preparing a needs-objectives matrix to determine which services would be beneficial to students at Gahr, the following steps were taken:

District surveys aimed at all participants in the educational community as well as special program questionnaires were used.

The needs survey portion of the 1975 *Pupil Personnel Services in Los Angeles County* was analyzed.

The needs portion of the National Association of Secondary School Principals' monograph, *This We Believe*, was read.

Counseling and guidance sections of the RISE report were considered.

San Diego city schools' *Model for Action* was viewed.

Gahr High School surveys (including an assessment of the parents of the freshman class) were completed.

Resulting from this survey was a matrix for needs objectives which reflects categories revolving around the guidance domains as follows:

Educational Personal—Social Career—Vocational

By combining the three domains with needs from the above sources, as well as an NDEA survey of counseling tasks related to needs (1976 San Diego State University) the matrix was developed.

This *Practitioner* was developed by Nancy DeLeonibus, Research Associate for NASSP.

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